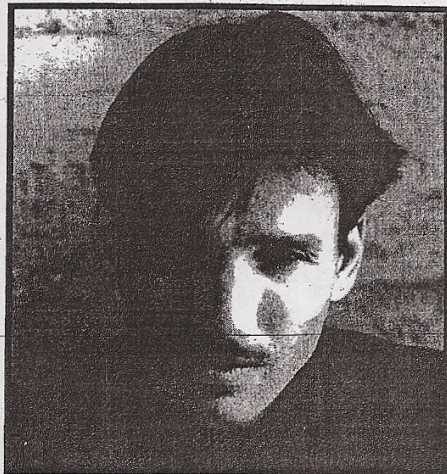


ROBERT DE ANDREIS



Columnist Robert De Andreis

One last kiss

by ROBERT DE ANDREIS

I've been in a foul mood all month, but I won't apologize. You'd understand if you knew what went on over here. Besides, the only time I'll ever apologize is when I stop growing and expressing the moody truths of my waning days.

Some people find honor in masking their pain. Before AIDS, I never complained much, but since then I've learned that no one is served by silence. If you are in pain and smile, you are exhibiting inappropriate behavior. No one can comfort you if they don't know you're hurting.

Over the years I've forced myself to express it all in writing. I know it's painful to read some times, but it's not my intention to hurt anyone. I wish I could mask the bitter underside of my soul some weeks, but if I do, I won't feel peace either.

A personal shift happened today. Finally, after months of stoic numbness, I let myself break down and cry. I'm not as strong as you think. No one is.

I said goodbye to my friend of 20 years, Dexter, this month. The haunting sadness of his memorial was that no one there knew Dex. It was mostly attended by the straight friends of Dexter's caregiver. I went at great effort; my pneumonia was starting to kick in, my face was swollen, disfigured and scabbed over from KS treatments, and I was so weak I could barely walk without hacking. It saddened me that none of Dex's gay friends were there, mostly because they are either dead or burnt out with memorials. Who will bury the last one, the guardian of the past, dense with the memory of who we are?

Communication started breaking down in my family months ago. Gradually, they stopped calling. I asked my mom to stop calling a few months ago because she'd only call when she was depressed. They all stopped. This spiraled into resentment until I didn't want to talk to anyone. After I told my dad I had pneumonia, I still didn't hear from anyone. There I was, one sleepless night after another, wondering why no one was concerned that I had a near-fatal lung infection. I became sick to my stomach and jittery until I developed an allergic reaction with a spike fever and rash. My doctor changed medications to new pills which gave me intense intestinal problems. My recent articles illustrate a seldom-discussed phenomenon: illness, fever, sleeplessness, antibiotics and queasiness create a tempest of mood swings where judgment is askew and depression can plunge one into the depths of despair.

On Easter, my dear friend John took me to the Patio on Castro Street for a great dinner. But when we stood up, I knew something was wrong. We walked slowly outside and I said, "I don't think I can." With that, I lunged to the curb and threw up in one continuous stream of vomit as John tried to comfort me. I never throw up — it was so upsetting to me. I could hear people gasp and make rude comments.

That night I prayed the new pills would stay down or we'd have to switch to IV therapy. I also prayed the morning paper would arrive, after the new carrier missed four weeks in a row, and I prayed the infestation of ants would finally stop crawling on me all night. I kept obsessing about my family: "I'm dying, for God's sake, what's so hard about a monthly phone call to say you're thinking about me?"

Whenever I have a close call with illness, I'm annoyed at myself for not having my legal affairs in order yet. As difficult as this was, I contacted an AIDS lawyer and had him draw up a will and designate my durable power of attorney and medical power of attorney. It's emotionally tough to face, but once it's done, a certain peace of mind is in place.

Tony, my volunteer, pointed out that I'm not smoking any more. Yes, a near-fatal lung infection is a good reason to quit. He reminded me of the lazy reason I started in the fall: because I was seeing a lot of Elliot at the time and he smoked.

I haven't seen Elliott since I asked him to stop showing up unannounced, drunk, at my front door. That request put an end to our passionate affair as it was going into the third year. I was so self-righteous last winter when I made that demand; regrettably, he's been the last man to share my bed and kiss my lips. Oh, Elliott, did we ever say goodbye? I realize now I represent mortality for him, along with lust and sensual mischief. What a mix! No wonder he could only show up drunk — sex and death are a bitch to embrace cold and sober.

For weeks my therapist listened to my circular fixations on my family woes. It was all stuck in my head. I had scripted imagined responses for all their denials. Did I really have to explain to them the basic principles of support for the millionth time? "No!" my therapist said. He said I was working too hard, that I was doing all their work, too, and there was no place for them to enter because my thoughts had so filled the attic in my head that the door couldn't budge. He said that sometimes doing the work means letting go and letting others do their part. Finally, it all made sense.

I took the drawer that was so stuffed in my head and slid it out, creating a space for someone else to fill. An hour later my sister called. I hadn't heard from her in weeks. She relayed her rehearsed version of how

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New drug combination fights AIDS

by DOUG STOKKE

The combination of Retrovir brand zidovudine (AZT) and the investigational drug 3TC™ (lamivudine) reduces by 92 percent the amount of virus in the blood of patients infected with HIV, according to a study presented April 30 at the Second International Congress on Drug Therapy in HIV.

This reduction is much greater than what is seen with any single licensed therapy.

The patients receiving the combination experienced an 80-cell increase at week 24. At week 48, this increase persisted with a 49-cell increase over baseline. Patients who

received Retrovir alone over the same period of CD4+ cell counts drop by an average of seven cells at week 24. However, patients in the Retrovir-only group who switched to the combination after weeks of study showed an increase of 40 cells above baseline by week 48.

These data show the combination of Retrovir of 3TC to have the most prolonged and pronounced effect of any drug regimen studied to date in suppressing the replication of the virus and boosting the body's own infection-fighting capabilities.

Researchers theorize that 3TC may play a key role in preventing the development of viral resistance of Retrovir, thereby increasing the duration of the proven antiviral effect of Retrovir.

De Andreis

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confused the family had been. How confusing is it to tell your dying brother that you're thinking about him? So helpless, yet so unwilling to get help — how are they going to grieve without me around to tell them how? Then she said she learned

that I was sick, not from my dad, but from *The Sentinel*. I guess he didn't want to upset anyone, except for me, that is.

I sat in my living room that night, gazing into the lights of the city, feeling a calm I hadn't felt in weeks. Just then I heard soft footsteps of someone coming up the stairs. Oh my God! Did I

conjure him up, too? He was out of breath, his heart beating so loudly I could hear it through the door as he rang the bell, hoping I'd let him in one last time ...

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